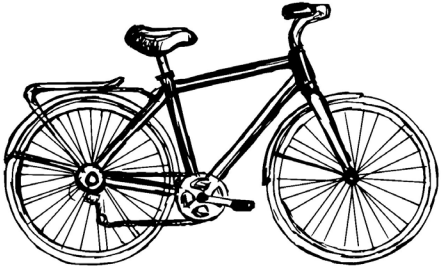
Corking

Using your body, bike, moped, scooter, motorcycle, skates, or car to help with traffic and safety in and around marches



BLACK LIVES MATTER

This zine was created by BLM Bike Bloc PDX. We formed in the summer of 2020, during the George Floyd Uprising in Portland, Oregon. This was made in the winter of 2021, and represents our beliefs and practices as they currently stand.

Bike Bloc works in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. Our focus is increasing safety for marches and stationary events through the physical use of our bodies, bikes, and other vehicles, as well as through nonviolent communication and deescalation tactics.

What's in this Zine?

Making a Corking Plan

Effective Corking

Being Prepared

Inclusivity & Radical Self Care

Communication

Non-violence & De-escalation

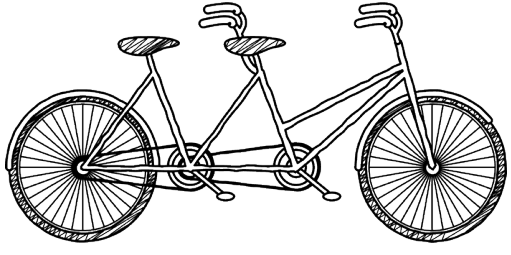
Everyday Abolition

Building an Affinity Group

Making a Corking Plan

Planning ahead with organizers allows for the most robust corking safety plan. Marches can also totally be corked on the fly with corkers using their skills and intuition to provide safety as needed.

If you know of a march that may benefit from corking, reach out to the organizers and ask if they think it's a fit. If yes, then work with a buddy or two to build the corking plan. Sometimes organizers want to be very involved in the planning process, sometimes they want to only be updated about progress, and other times they just want it handled. Each situation is unique. Provide support while continuing to center the organizer and their mission.



A robust corking plan may include:

- An understanding of the make up of the march. What other support cars will be present? A sound truck leading the march? Medic cars? Snack vans?
- Scouting the march route and determining any tricky roads, intersections, bridges, etc.
- Estimating how many bikes, scooters, foot corkers, quad skaters, motorcycles, and cars could be helpful to have, based on the predicted size of the march.
- A plan for communicating with fellow corkers while on the ground. Walkie talkies work great for this.
- A plan for communicating with someone in the march. This could be an organizer with a walkie talkie, or a foot corker relaying info back and forth about pacing and any potential changes of plans.
- A plan for getting all the corkers in place as the march is mobilizing, coordinating with the march's support vehicles.
- Investigating the potential of being in communication with medics and other safety support people.

Effective Corking

Effective corkers are actively anti-racist.

Effective corkers are aware of the mission of the organization being supported, and the focus of the march.

Effective corkers commit to using nonviolent communication and de-escalation strategies.

Effective corkers practice inclusivity and transformative justice.

Effective corkers use tactics and communication practices that don't re-create police culture.

Effective Corking Roles

Side Corking

The bulk of corking is done by **side corkers.** These folks are responsible for keeping the sides of the march safe, and helping drivers find alternate routes to their destinations, or working with them while they patiently wait.

- **Side corkers** work in pairs when possible, as each intersection is best corked by at least two bike corkers.
- Half the **side corkers** work the left side, half work the right side.
- Each intersection can either be corked tight (right next to the march), or one block out. Tight is good for smaller marches because it's quicker. One block out means traffic has the option to divert around, and also leaves a safety buffer for the marchers.
- At the intersection, **side corkers** get off their bike and put it between themselves and traffic. Kickstands are nice, or bikes can be flipped and stood upsidedown.
- Hand signals can be used to communicate with traffic. If it's dark or rainy, glow sticks are helpful too.
- When the marchers and the first of any rear corking vehicles have passed, **side corkers** clear the intersection and move up.
- **Side corkers** leapfrog. When it's time to move up, **side corkers** bike up past all the other corkers and take the first front uncorked intersection, coordinating with the pushers.

Floating and Scouting

It's nice to have a few folks who can **float** and are flexible to fill in gaps as needed, or **scout** ahead to assess upcoming complications.

Leading

While corking can totally be done organically, it can increase effectiveness to have a couple designated **leads.** These folks can be responsible for creating the corking plan ahead of time, coordinating to get a sufficient amount of corkers on board, organizing a pre-meet before the event and a debrief afterwards, finding radios (if they're being used) for all corkers, and making sure needs are being met during the march itself. After the debrief, **leads** may loop back with the organizers to exchange reflections.

REMEMBER:

Corking an intersection is not a legally-sanctioned action. Corkers aren't cops. Corkers cannot TELL drivers to go a different way. Corkers can ASK them to support the event by choosing a different route, or letting them know that they can also just wait it out, if that's what they'd prefer.

Pushing

If the march plans to go into oncoming traffic, **pushers** can be used to clear the way ahead of the march.

- This method uses two groups of **pushers,** moving forward together like an inchworm. As the **pushers** advance to divert oncoming traffic, side corkers keep pace to close side arteries for the marchers.
- **Pushing** can be done all by bikes, but it's safer if the second **pushers,** the one closest to the marchers, is a pair of cars. Cars can physically stop an angry driver from hitting the crowd. Motorcycles or scooters can also be used for pushing.
- **Pushing** starts with the second **pushers** just behind the first intersection in front of the march. The first **pushers** move ahead to start diverting traffic at the next intersection. As they move ahead, they may miss a few oncoming cars on that block.
- Side corkers start corking that first intersection.
- All cars that had not been diverted by the first **pushers** will be forced to divert by the second **pushers.**
- Once the whole block is clear of traffic, the second **pushers** advances to take over holding the position of the first **pushers.**
- The first **pushers** moves on to secure the next block, and so on.

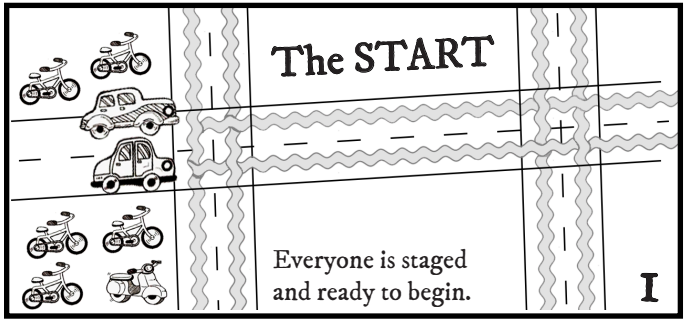
Key for Pushing\ Diagram

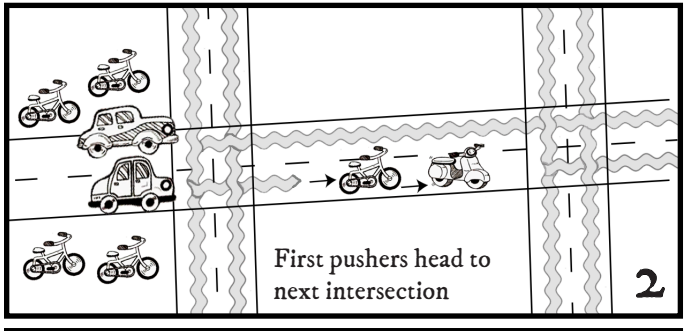
Traffic is flowing:

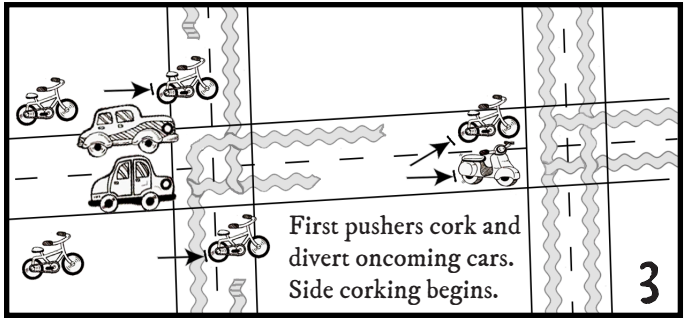
Vehicle is moving forward:

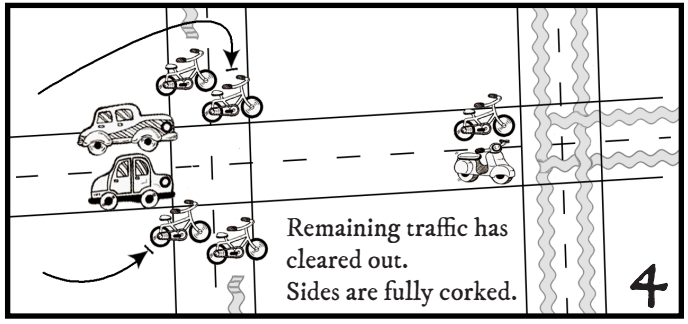
Traffic is stopped:

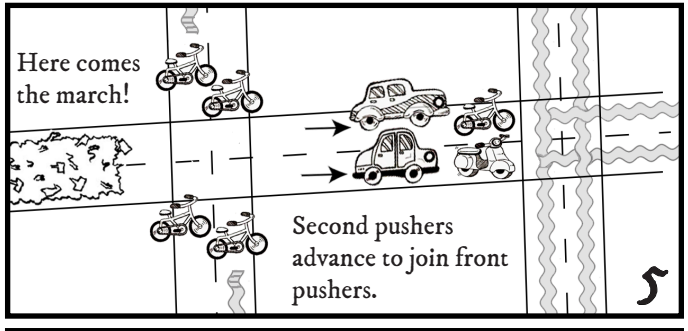
Vehicle moves forward and stops:

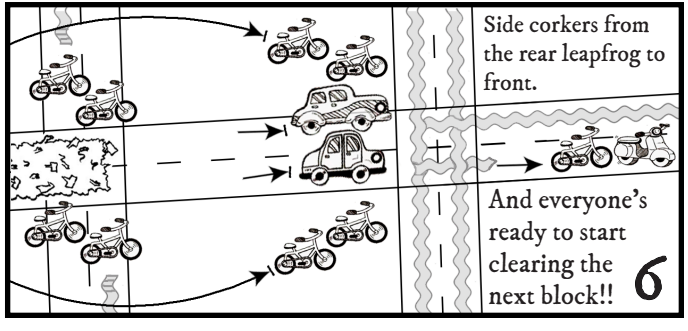

The START
Everyone is staged and ready to begin.
1


First pushers head to next intersection
2


First pushers cork and divert oncoming cars. Side corking begins.
3


Remaining traffic has cleared out. Sides are fully corked.
4


Here comes the march!
Second pushers advance to join front pushers.
5


Side corkers from the rear leapfrog to front.
And everyone's ready to start clearing the next block!!
6

The Pre-Meet

It's helpful to have all corkers, and maybe also other support folks, gather together before a march or event. Some things that might be included:

- Starting with a Land Acknowledgment
- Centering the day's work on the mission of the event that is being supported
- Sharing any parameters or requests from the organizers
- Reviewing hand signs (some suggestions listed in the "Communication" section of this zine)
- Sharing what on the ground communication will look like. If the group is using walkie talkies, sharing the primary and backup channels verbally and in an on-the-ground chat thread.
- Overviewing radio etiquette (see "Communication" section)
- Discussing some de-escalation principles and tactics
- Going over the route and plans for any tricky intersections
- Identifying who will be filling each corking role

The Debrief

We learn through reflection. Having a debrief at the conclusion of the march or event provides space to grow.

- Affirmations: What went well?
- Constructives: What could be improved on?

Effective Corking Dos and Don'ts

Do secure intersections before the march gets there and hold them till it's passed. **Don't** cork so far ahead that intersections are held when they don't need to be, and don't leave before the marchers are safe.

Do block as much of the intersection as possible. **Don't** be afraid to ask for help.

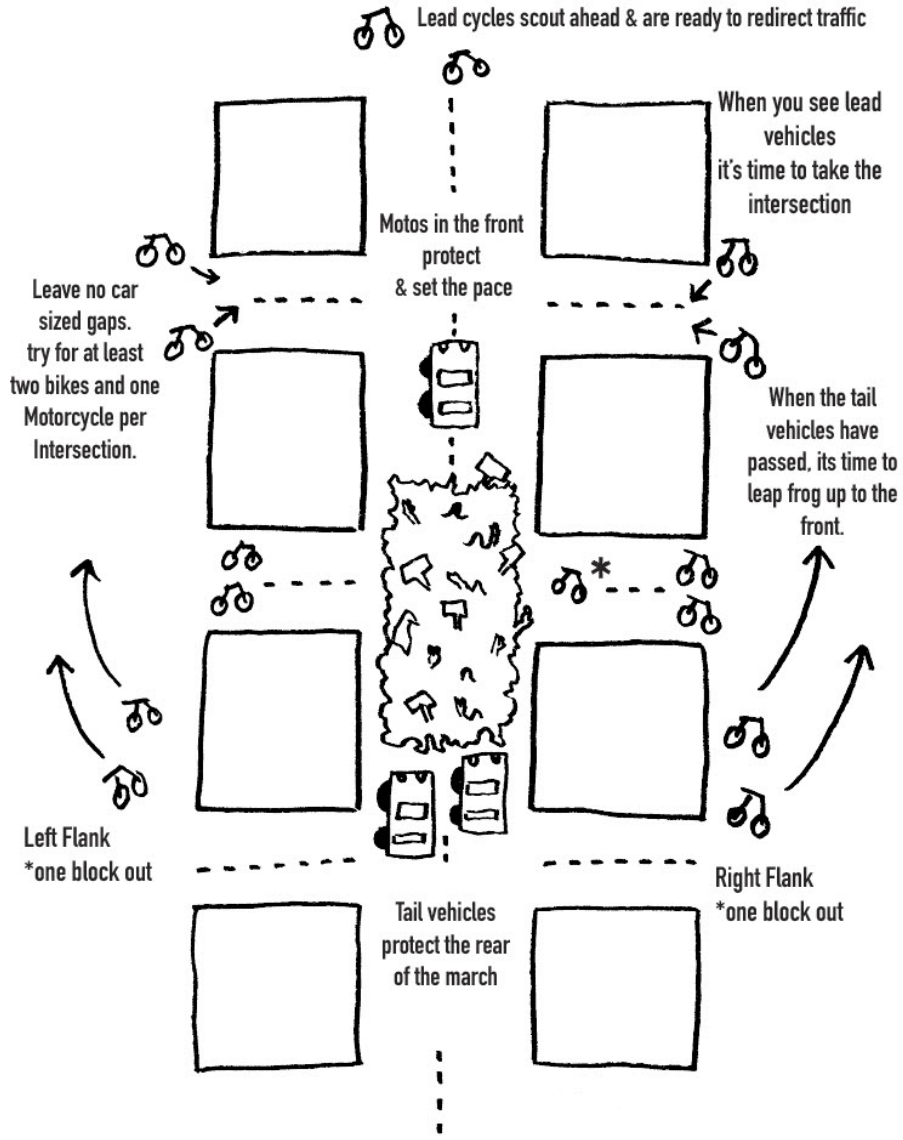
Do document when possible. Film with your phone, or buy a go pro (cheapish when bought used). **Don't** put your camera in someone's face. Folks don't like that.

Do be friendly with passers by. But **don't** give away the route or destination of a march unless the organizers have already made it public.

Do keep an eye out for emergency vehicles. **Don't** get in their way.

MOST IMPORTANTLY:

Do stay flexible. Sometimes circumstances change. Sometimes you need to be like water. Sometimes you need to be like ice.


Lead cycles scout ahead & are ready to redirect traffic
When you see lead vehicles it's time to take the intersection
Motos in the front protect & set the pace
Leave no car sized gaps. try for at least two bikes and one Motorcycle per Intersection.
When the tail vehicles have passed, its time to leap frog up to the front.
Left Flank *one block out
Right Flank *one block out
Tail vehicles protect the rear of the march

Another Diagram

Each situation and group is unique. Here is one example of how corking can work. Find what works for the folks you are supporting and the people you are working with.

Being Prepared

What to Bring for Bike Corking?

- ☐ Your bicycle!
  A beater bike is good, in case you use it to stop a charging car
- ☐ A buddy, or a plan to find one at the event
- ☐ Helmet
- ☐ Lights
- ☐ Neon clothing, like a high vis safety vest
- ☐ Water and snacks
- ☐ A face mask, if Covid is still raging while you read this
- ☐ National Lawyer's Guild number memorized or on your body

More Stuff to Maybe Bring

- ☐ Whistle to blow if there's danger
- ☐ Walkie talkie for communicating with other corkers
- ☐ First aid kit
- ☐ Hand sanitizer (again, if Covid's still a thing... or just because)
- ☐ Portable phone charger for you or a comrade
- ☐ Gear to protect from angry racists: bullet proof vest, goggles for pepper spray or mace, puncture wound med kit
- ☐ Gear to protect from cops: black bloc clothing, clothes for un-blocing, gas mask/respirator, goggles and eye wipes for tear gas

Risk Assessment Checklist

___ Are you prepared to be in a stressful situation?

___ Do you have an emergency contact?

___ Can you be arrested? Have you planned for that?

___ Are you ready for the risk level of this particular event?

Honor yourself. Sometimes you might find that a situation or role is too far beyond your current physical or emotional capacity. When that happens, assess your options. Are there other ways you can lend a hand? Could you scout around the perimeter instead? Is there another way to help your comrades? Is it simply time to go home and care for yourself?

Bike Safety Checklist

___ Tires: pumped and tread is good?

___ Brakes: Working and pads are good?

___ Chain: Clean and greased and has good tension?

___ Tools, spare tube, patch kit, etc?

Leave At Home

- ☐ Egos
- ☐ white supremacist tendencies
- ☐ Hetero-patriarchal tendencies
- ☐ Desire to fight with chuds

Communication

Your Voice: Talk to each other! Be clear with what you observe. Be clear with what you need.

Whistles: Try to get everyone in your group a whistle. Portland uses one tweet for "Heads up!" Two tweets for "Emminent Danger!!!"

Walkie Talkies: If you want to use radios, work to ensure every corker, or at least every pairing, has a radio, and that all the radios are programmed to the same frequencies. Learn basic radio protocol.

Hand Signs: Real useful for quick messages on the go.

Encrypted Messaging System: Pick one that works for everyone. Drop important, but not time-critical, info into the event chat.

Walkie Talkies

When speaking: Hold the button down for a beat. Speak clearly. Be concise. Repeat your message. Signify you're done by saying "over."

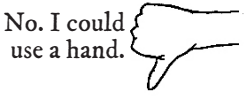
Keep the channel clear: Minimize chatter. Carry radios so that the talk button won't accidentally get pushed in.

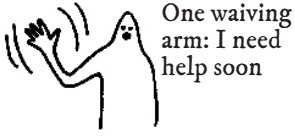
Have a plan for getting jammed: A motivated person can listen in and disrupt communication. Pick one primary channel, and a few for back-up. Share this info at the pre-meet and in the chat thread. Use a code word that means "time for the backup channel!" Something like "Pillow fight!" or "Coffee time!" or "Pizza party!"

Don't give info away for free: Cops or fascists might be listening. Only share code names and location when that info is important.

Keep access in mind: Radios must be programmed to the same frequencies to be compatible. They also cost money. Some comrades with more means may consider buying and/or programming extras.

Some Hand Sign Ideas





Two waiving arms: I need help RIGHT NOW

Pushing arms downwards: Please slow down.

Thanks!!

REMEMBER: This work is stressful and can be really dangerous. Our communication skills drop away when we enter fight, flight, or freeze. Practice ahead of time. That can increase safety for everyone.

Corking and Inclusivity

Corking can be for everyone. If you want to help, there's a task that will be a good fit for you.

Partnering up on corking roles helps spread the knowledge around. Having a buddy can also help ease stress and lower the bar for entry.

Participating in corking can be done by bike, moped, scooter, motorcycle, car, roller skates, kick bike, unicycle, electric unicycle, inlines, skateboard, wheelchair, or on foot.

If being on the ground is not within someone's current capacity, there are remote tasks that can help. Some work needs to be done before-hand. That might include helping plan ahead of time, making maps, coordinating with other mutual aid providers, or even locating bathrooms along the route.
During an event, sometimes it's helpful to have folks remotely monitoring live streams or twitter, and feeding relevent information to the folks on the ground.

Again, corking can be for everyone.

Radical Self Care

Safety work can be scary and dangerous. Trauma comes not only from the events themselves, but also from how we respond to them and how we care for ourselves in the immediate aftermath. Not all trauma from safety work can be avoided, but some can be mitigated. Take care of yourself. Maybe that means eating right, getting therapy, meditating, spending intentional time with loved ones. You know you best.

Many of us were brought up with false ideals around productivity and worth. We are cultured to believe that being committed to a cause requires us to burn the candle from both ends. But that just burns the candle out faster. The revolution is here to stay, and if we want our involvement to be sustained, we need be nurturing towards ourselves.

Practice radical self care.

Non-Violence and De-Escalation

Non-violence is a foundational practice of corking. Corking is about keeping people safe. People make safer choices when they feel calm than when their emotional state is escalated. This goes for corkers as well as drivers.

When marching down streets, daily activities will be disrupted and can be disorienting and frustrating for individuals in cars using the roads. Corkers are here to help.

Spreading calm starts with feeling calm.

Corking can be scary. One proven method for lowering your own activation level is as follows:

- Create a Strength Statement. It should be short, true, and in the present tense. One easy go-to is "I can."
- Before stepping into a hard situation, inhale deeply.
- Say your Strength Statement to yourself.
- Exhale slowly.
- Repeat as needed.

Useful De-Escalation Phrases

"There's a march passing. It should clear this intersection in X minutes. Can I help you find a route around it, or would you rather wait here?"

"How can I help you get to where you are going?"

"I hear that this is inconvenient for you."

"I understand that this can be frustrating."

"Thank you for your patience while the march passes."

More Thoughts on De-Escalation

Speak with intention and empathy.

It's helpful to approach everyone with genuine and honest respect.

When pointing directions, studies show folks respond better to two or more fingered points than just one finger.

Stand back at least 6 ft from car windows when talking to drivers. Crouch down to be at their eye level. (Sometimes angry drivers mace corkers. Goggles can help it from getting in your eyes.)

The ultimate goal is to increase safety. Sometimes that means de-escalation. Sometimes it means neutrally not engaging, sometimes it means walking away, sometimes it means getting everyone to safety.

★ If you are white, REMEMBER: ★

Any escalation of violence that you participate in can lead to a greater negative impact on Black or Brown bodies than on your own body.

Everyday Abolition

To abolish the police, we must actively practice abolition together.

Transformative Justice is abolition in action. Practice it in your heart, in your daily actions, and in any conflict that may arise.

The white supremacist police state has taught us to think and act in ways that value power and control over community and connection. We need to unlearn all of that.

Non-hierarchical organizing is great! Corking works well with shared and rotating leadership. Build in opportunities for all.

The focus of corking is to help with the flow of the march. Unless an organizer has explicitely asked, corking isn't there to direct or control the flow of the march. Be a support, not a boss.

Corking is a support activity. The movement can be supported by actively working to de-center ourselves, and actively centering organizers and march participants.

Share space.
Support each other.
We are all in this together.

White People:

This is not your time. Be supportive, but step back.

Don't police the tactics or tone of organizers or comrades who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color.

If you disagree with what's happening, you can choose to leave. But directing their behavior is not an option.

Actively work to break the habits of white supremacy and colonizer behavior. That includes all tendencies of white saviorism.

Cis Men:

Unlearning the patriarchy takes work.

Step up to the challenge of talking less, listening more.

Look for opportunities to de-center yourself.

Practice not elevating yourself over your non-cis-men comrades.

Participating in the Black Lives Matter movement requires white folks to do the internal work while simultaneously doing the external work.
There's a lot to dismantle.
There's a lot to unlearn.

DO THE WORK

(It's worth it!)

Building a Corking Affinity Group

Although it is possible to cork completely autonomously, there are benefits to working in a group structure.

Inclusivity, accessibility, and security culture are important. Have meetings. Get organized. Make group agreements. Move at the speed of trust. Be in community with each other and with the movement.

Bike Bloc's current Group Statement:

We center our work on the liberation of Black and Brown people. We work collectively and personally to dismantle racism, colonialism, and the hetero-patriarchy.

We aim to spread calm. We use deescalation tactics in order to support individuals whose activation levels are elevated to find a path forward that is safer for themselves and for the event participants.

We practice decentralised leadership, with members rotating through leading and supporting roles. Our decision making process is a modified consensus system. We care for each other by practicing consent-based security culture.

We are autonomous individuals, united by our commitment to this movement. We are responsible for ourselves. We also understand that when we work collectively, we are interdependent, and that our choices and actions impact one another.

We stand strong when we stand together.
Black Lives Matter.

Resources

Be Focused
Black Lives Matter
https://blacklivesmatter.com/

Be Inclusive
AORTA Collective
(Anti Opression Resource and Training Alliance)
http://aorta.coop/resources

Be Safe
The Ruckus Society's "Security Culture for Activists"
https://ruckus.org/training-manuals/security-tips-resources

Be Organized
adrienne maree brown's "Emergent Strategy"
https://www.akpress.org/emergentstrategy.html

Be Connected
Cyclista Zine on IG
https://www.instagram.com/cyclista_zine

This zine offers a holistic approach to providing traffic and safety support for marches and events.

Read About:
-technicalities of corking-
-tips for supporting organizers-
-self-care for sustained engagement-
-practices of de-escalation-
-creating inclusive spaces-
-everyday abolition-

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VERSION: 2021-02-17